



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor James L. Streeter, Councilors Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Paulann H. Sheets, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING - REVISED

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Streeter called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro and Councilor Peruzzotti

Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Watson

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2010-0239 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meetings of September 7, 2010 and November 9, 2010 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. NEW BUSINESS

2006-0282 School Improvement Project - Phase II

Discussed

John Scott, Chairman of the Phase II School Design Committee, was present to address the Council. He presented a memo from the Committee, similar to one presented previously when the Committee recommended two potential sites for a new middle school. The Council asked the Committee to make a recommendation for a middle school site. After reviewing the results of a traffic study and discussing the two sites in more detail, the Committee ultimately chose the Claude Chester Site. Mr. Scott provided an overview of the recommendation including grade configuration.

Councilor Monteiro questioned the reliability of state grant funds. Mr. Scott stated that the Committee was assured that the state money will be available unless the recommended application deadline is missed. She questioned the "plans" to use Fitch Middle School as a recreation center and Mr. Scott noted that the Phase II School Design Committee had no meetings or discussions with the Parks and Recreation Commission. Councilor Monteiro further noted that citizens have expressed a concern with the use of Poquonnock Plains Park. Mr. Scott explained this was a significant concern of the Committee as well. The current proposal includes "turfing" a field at Poquonnock Plains Park and removing the ledge outcropping so that fields can be built on the middle school site.

Councilor Flax noted that the savings from combining the middle schools is being directed to creating a pre-K program. He questioned the impact of not doing the pre-K and instead realizing the savings. He suggested that showing cost savings would create credibility for the project and he questioned what the actual savings would be.

Superintendent of Schools Paul Kadri explained that he is looking at taking the efficiencies of combining the middle schools along with early retirements to create a full-day Kindergarten and a pre-K program. Research shows that a pre-K program yields academic and cost saving benefits. He feels the ethnic and social diversity in Groton requires all students to enter the first grade on a level playing field.

Mr. Kadri noted that if only the middle school were to be addressed, this would be a completely different plan because of the number of factors involved. He described how such a plan might impact existing schools. Mr. Scott noted that there is a domino effect associated with addressing the middle school and the Committee also wanted to address vacant schools, underserved neighborhoods, and the concern about having a school in the City.

Mr. Kadri stated he has been meeting with state legislators so that they are aware of this project. He hopes that the state money will be there. Groton's reimbursement rate has gone up since Phase I of the school project. Pre-K will be mandated one day and there are racial diversity compliance issues to consider also. The traffic report indicates that both sites can be accommodated.

Mr. Kadri reviewed his discussions with the Parks and Recreation Commission about the proposal to place synthetic grass on a field at Poquonnock Plains Park and create a recreational center at Fitch Middle School. His latest plan includes removal of the rock ledge. The Phase II Committee did not review or approve a plan to use Fitch Middle School.

Mayor Streeter noted that Poquonnock Plains Park is "sacred" ground and the Parks and Recreation Commission should not be making determinations that are the Council's to make. Mr. Kadri noted other items to be discussed regarding the middle school include a pitched roof, use of geothermal heating, the interconnection of resources with Parks and Recreation, and design.

Councilor Monteiro has heard discussions that the Council has not been a party to about making Fitch Middle School a recreation center with a swimming pool. She noted that the vision has been to use Fitch Middle School for Town offices. She stated she is leery of discussions that have taken place without the Town being involved.

Councilor Peruzzotti expressed confidence that the questions and issues have been addressed by the Committee. She feels the Council needs to make a choice quickly and she expressed support for moving forward with the Committee's recommendation. Councilor Johnson clarified that Fitch Middle School will be closed and there are no plans for it as part of the Phase II referendum. Mr. Kadri stated that there needs to be a discussion relative to construction of a pool there. Mr. Kadri also has plans for Sutton Park.

Councilor Flax noted that the cost of traffic improvements at the Claude Chester site is significantly higher than the Kolnaski site. He asked what the cost differential would be for the two sites. Mr. Kadri stated the construction costs for the two sites are comparable. He feels the Claude Chester site is better and less remote. Councilor Monteiro requested a copy of the traffic study.

Town Manager Oefinger stated that Town Council authorization to begin preparation of the bond ordinance would be helpful. Additional meetings at the staff level are required to further discuss details. Mr. Kadri stated he would like to develop conceptual plans and costs for the Claude

Chester site, but he needs direction on a pitched roof, geothermal heat, and recreation.

A special meeting with the Board of Education was scheduled for Monday, December 6th at 7:00 p.m.

Rick DeMatto of the Permanent School Building Committee noted that lessons learned from Phase I include using a pitched roof. The flat roof at the high school was a cost-cutting measure and there have been problems. Also essential is building an environmentally friendly facility.

The Town Manager recommended authorizing preparation of the bond ordinance.

A motion was made by Mayor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Johnson, to approve the recommendations of the Phase II School Design Committee.

The motion carried unanimously

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Flax, to authorize preparation of a bond ordinance for the Phase II school project.

The motion carried unanimously

2010-0242

Meeting with Commanding Officer of the Sub Base

Discussed

Captain Marc Denno, Commanding Officer of the Sub Base, addressed the Council about safety and security concerns associated with the former Fusconi property across from the main gate of the Sub Base. Cars have been abandoned there or placed for sale, and there are issues with loitering and other security concerns. Captain Denno is working with the Town to redesign the intersection and he is looking for the Town Council to support a meeting between the state and interested parties. There are environmental concerns associated with the Fusconi site and there will be a cost to clean it up. Captain Denno would like to identify the mitigation required and the exact costs so that the Town can take possession of the property.

Mayor Streeter noted that he would like to bring the sail of the USS Groton to the area. Discussion followed on the condition of the Fusconi property and the intersection.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the traffic light can not be replaced without using the Fusconi property. The configuration of the main gate has changed so that the traffic lights do not line up with the travel way. The Fusconi property, which actually extends into the intersection, is important to improve the alignment of Military Highway. There is no parking for the Fusconi property so there are no development opportunities. The Town has an appraisal for the property.

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, explained that this area has been studied for years and a number of improvements have been funded. Mr. Schneider reviewed a plan for the intersection including proposed signal locations and road realignment prepared by Purcell Engineers. The property which was previously occupied by a drycleaner has undergone cleanup, but a Licensed Environmental Professional has not signed off on the site which would complete the process. Mr. Schneider reviewed the steps necessary to address remaining DEP concerns, obtain the property, and make the improvements, along with the potential costs involved.

The Town Manager noted the Town is in the process of gathering information for funding solicitation from the Council of Governments. Three Military Highway/Crystal Lake Road projects were previously reviewed with the Council of Governments and were well received because of the desire to invest in the area after the last round of BRAC. The Town Manager described the process to submit this project and requirements for the funding.

2006-0100

Thames Street Rehabilitation Study

Discussed

An updated bond referendum schedule prepared by the Town Clerk was provided to the Council.

2010-0241**Probate Court Update****Discussed**

The Town Manager explained that around the first of the year, the regional probate court system will be instituted and the Southeastern Connecticut court will be located in Groton. A plan has been developed to expand the footprint of the current court into the area currently used by the Registrar of Voters, which requires relocation of the Registrars. Alternatives are being considered. The Town Manager noted that the Registrar of Voters does not need to be co-located with the Town Clerk's Office and reviewed alternative locations.

2010-0240**Historic District Commission Issues****Discussed and Recommended no action taken**

Mayor Streeter and Councilor Monteiro met with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Historic District Commission (HDC) where they discussed correspondence, complaints and concerns that have been received by the Town Council. The HDC feels that some of the complaints are embellished and/or outdated. Still, Mayor Streeter and Councilor Monteiro expressed to them that the HDC is a service agency. They also suggested that the full meetings of the HDC be recorded. A packet of information was provided to the Chairman and Vice Chairman and they were asked to forward it to the other members of the HDC. Councilor Monteiro clarified that there was no discussion of decisions that have been made by the HDC, only about the conduct during meetings. Mayor Streeter stated that the members of the HDC are dedicated and seem to have a legitimate concern and respect for the people who come before them.

Councilor Johnson asked if there would be a formal answer to the complaints. Mayor Streeter stated complaints that dealt with particular HDC decisions would not be addressed. The Council's concern was with meeting decorum. Councilor Flax expressed concern with the number of complaints and the perceived lack of consistency in HDC decisions. He asked about the specific code used by the Commission and it was noted that the Historic District Handbook can be found on the Town's Web site. The Town Manager noted that HDC members are supposed to have an historical background to make informed decisions.

Councilor Peruzzotti expressed the hope that consistency of the decisions will improve. She noted receipt of a letter from an HDC member questioning the Commission's actions. The Town Manager explained that consistency in the historic district is treating everyone fairly and having a dialog, not treating every building the same. Councilor Peruzzotti expressed concern with the financial impact on HDC decisions on applicants.

Mayor Streeter noted that he and Councilor Monteiro avoided the specifics of HDC decisions because the nature of the process is that the decision depends on a number of design factors. The biggest concern discussed were the allegations of inappropriate comments during the meeting as well as determining that there was no systematic problem with the recording equipment. Mayor Streeter added that if the Council has additional concerns or receives additional complaints, the Council can have a meeting with the full Historic District Commission.

The Committee of the Whole recessed at 8:10 p.m. and reconvened at 8:15 p.m.

2010-0238**Task Force on Climate Change and Sustainable Community - Extension****Discussed**

The Town Manager noted that the Task Force has been meeting for the last two years and is in the process of finalizing its report to the Council. The original resolution established the Task Force for a period of two years and appointments were made for terms ending December 2, 2010. The Town Manager asked if the Council would like to extend the Task Force and the consensus of the Council was that a period of three months should be sufficient.

Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2010-0172

FYE 2012 Budget

Discussed

The Town Manager would like to hire management consultant David Dunn, who previously worked on the updating of the non-union pay plan and job descriptions, to work with Town staff to look at building maintenance, grounds maintenance, fleet and equipment maintenance, golf course operations, and the Town Manager's office and Administrative Services. Funds are available through management study encumbrances. Mr. Dunn's recommendations should be available to incorporate into the FYE 2012 budget. The Town Manager reiterated his opinion that the Town of Groton needs an Assistant Town Manager. Town Manager Oefinger feels the advantages of bringing in a consultant from outside of the organization, and specifically Mr. Dunn, are his expertise, the lack of any preconceptions, and introduction of a level of discipline to complete the project.

A motion was made by Mayor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, to authorize the Town Manager to hire management consultant David Dunn to review various areas of Town operations.

The motion carried unanimously

2010-0008

Joint Meeting with Groton Long Point Board of Directors (2010 Standing Referral)

Discussed

The initial date chosen to meet with Groton Long Point now conflicts with a Noank School Reuse Task Force meeting and ICLEI Workshop. A meeting date of December 7th at 6:00 p.m. has been proposed to Bob Congdon.

2010-0171

Town Manager Annual Evaluation

Discussed

The Town Manager distributed his self-evaluation. Mayor Streeter asked that Councilors fill out their evaluation forms, forward them to the Mayor for him to tabulate the results, and be prepared to discuss the results at the next Committee of the Whole meeting. The Town Manager indicated his willingness to meet with individual Councilors, but he also expressed his desire to be evaluated by a Council of nine, not nine individual Councilors. He emphasized that he would like to receive feedback from the Council.

2010-0243

Town Council Appointments to Mystic and Noank Library Study Committee

Discussed

Mayor Streeter suggested the following appointments: Councilor O'Beirne, RTM members Kevin Power and Dana Semeraro, and citizen-at-large Jim Loughlin. Mayor Streeter will suggest that Councilor O'Beirne contact Stonington and the Director of the Mystic and Noank Library regarding their appointments.

A motion was made by Councilor Johnson, seconded by Councilor Flax, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2010-0244

Southeast Area Transit (SEAT) Service Cut

Discussed

The Town Manager distributed an e-mail chain from Ella Bowman, District Manager for SEAT, and a map of Route 11, a very important SEAT bus route in the Town of Groton. State funding for the route has been curtailed and ridership is down. Ms. Bowman is currently looking at alternatives and has indicated that she may have an option for the next six months. Ms. Bowman will keep the Town informed.

6. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.